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9. Aka-farmer relations in the northwest Congo Basin¹

SERGE BAHUCHET and HENRI GUILLAUME
translated by SHEILA M. VAN WYCK

The myth of the forest cocoon

For a variety of reasons, research carried out in central and southern Africa has long ignored the problem of contacts between the Later Stone Age populations of hunter-gatherers and the Iron Age peoples who brought techniques of food production, pottery-making and metallurgy. Recent archaeological research in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe and more sophisticated methods of dating have begun to provide us with evidence on the antiquity of these contacts, dating in some cases to at least the beginning of the Christian era (Miller 1969; Phillipson 1976). The co-existence of these two modes of existence has consisted not merely in a juxtaposition, but also has involved long-term exchange relations without technological assimilation. The antiquity and persistence of these relations compel us to perceive these foraging societies in a new light. Long assumed to have been on the fringe of history, these societies now appear to have been in contact, yet have nevertheless remained distinct. If some of them enable us to observe ancient forms of social and economic organization, they are by no means fossils of a prehistoric state, magically preserved. It is highly likely that centuries of proximity and contacts have had profound influences on both sides. From this viewpoint, it is clear that we must rely heavily on the findings of archaeology, linguistics and human biology for further insight.

The case of the Aka Pygmies illustrates the extent of these contacts. It appears that the western equatorial forest fringe, where the Aka live, was penetrated by Savannah people as early as 2400-500 B.C. (N. David forthcoming). This colonization, which took the form of local and progressive migrations rather than a single massive move, was carried out by people, perhaps already Bantu, who made stone tools and pottery, and probably had techniques of food production. In David's view:

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Aka Pygmy net hunters procure game in part to trade with farmers. Pygmies may have originally adopted the net-hunting technique from their farming neighbours (S. Bahuchet)

Migratory movement would have been primarily by canoe along the coast and the waterways, and settlement concentrated in riverine areas with rich alluvial soils. The economy would have been based upon yams for starches, palm oil for lipids and fish as the main source of animal protein, although goats may have accompanied the immigrants and Pygmy-Bantu symbiosis have provided the latter with game and other forest produce. (David forthcoming)

The spread of iron from Nigeria into southern Africa probably started as early as the Christian era, and was most likely effected through the natural communications networks within the forest itself. The river system of the Congo basin provided the probable axes of diffusion. The traditional view, that iron spread through the north, along the forest edge (Phillipson forthcoming), has recently been called into question by new findings which show the progressive occupation of the area by people of the Adamawa-Oubangui family from as early as the first millennium A.D. (David and Vidal 1977). Already in possession of food production and pottery-making techniques, and having acquired metallurgy without the help of the Bantu, they would have impeded the

expansion of the latter to the east. Moving in this direction themselves, some members of the Oubanguian branch went back to the south-east via forest waterways (probably from 1000 A.D. onwards).

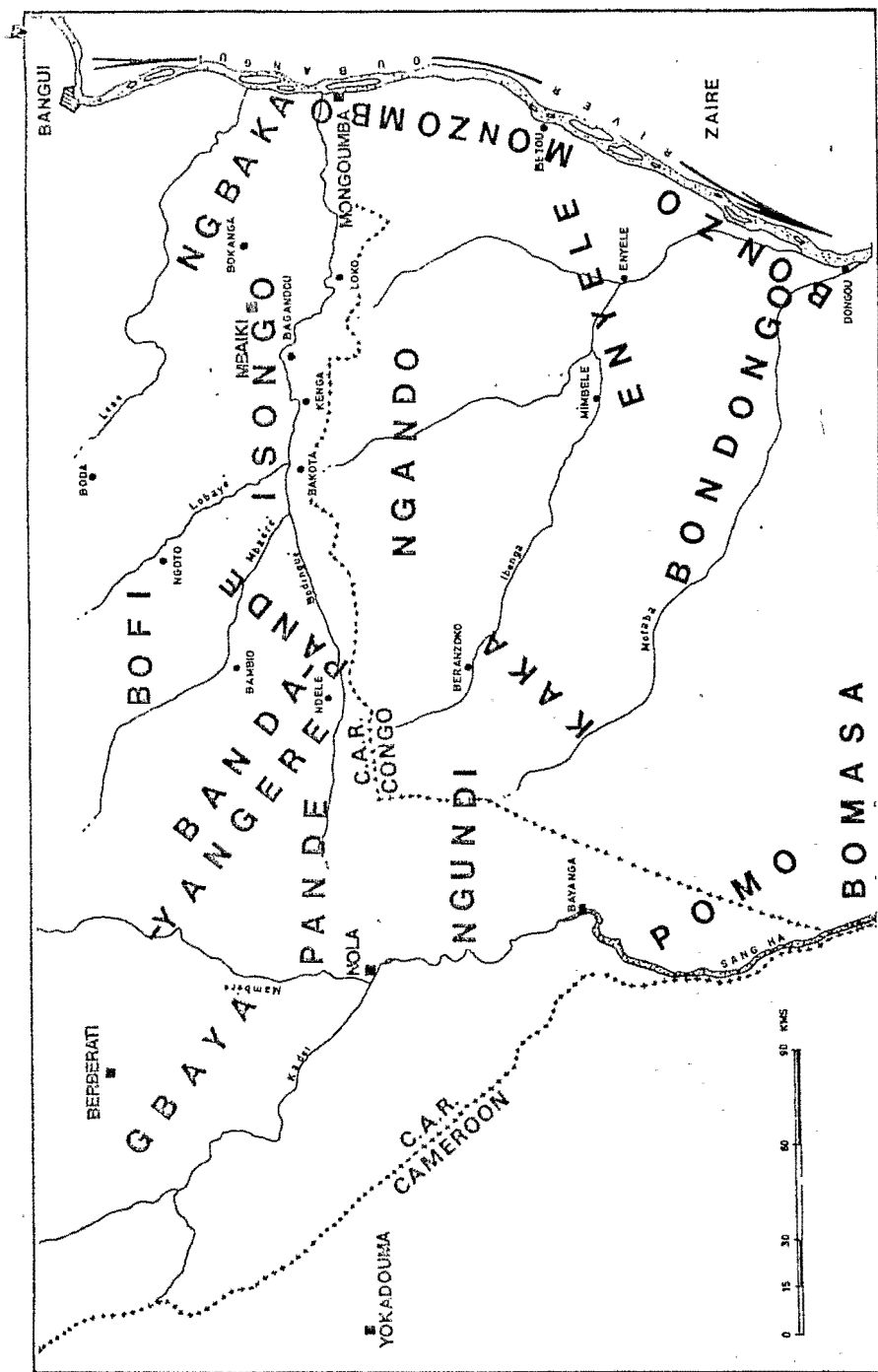
Evidence of the antiquity of forest penetration suggests that there has been a long tradition of contact between Pygmies and the Bantu-speaking people, as well as the Oubanguian people. Several recent studies of Pygmy languages also call into question the widespread image of Pygmies living confined and isolated in their forest cocoon. The important variable of contact history, then, must not be neglected. Even if contacts were limited and occasional, they clearly contributed to the contemporary identity of the various peoples. The interest of such information to researchers is underlined in the preliminary attempt, partly hypothetical, to reconstruct historically the way of life of the Mbuti Pygmies of the Ituri in Zaire (Harako 1976).

For the moment we will limit ourselves to a discussion of oral traditions, specifically those which reveal the ideological viewpoints which Pygmies and their neighbours have of themselves and the nature of their relations. These attitudes derive from practical and economic reality of contact, and do not constitute a mere justification of the latter; rather, they are one of the conditions which shaped relations in the first place.

Civilizers, saviours and savages

The Aka (*moaka*; *baaka* or *biaka*) are related to both Oubanguian and Bantu-speaking people (Figure 9.1). They speak a language of a Bantu type not mentioned by M. Guthrie (1967-71), but which can be included in the C-10 group. C-10 also features two geographically neighbouring languages, the Ngando and the Isongo (Cloarec-Heiss and Thomas 1978). The Aka language, while obviously borrowed, is also unique and autonomous, a result of its long evolution from the source language (Thomas *et al.* forthcoming). Today, there is no mutual comprehension between the Aka and neighbouring Bantu groups. Relations between them favour the use of Bantu languages (Guillaume and Delobbeau 1979), a phenomenon which reflects the more general state of domination the Pygmies live under. The linguistic affiliations of Aka, and the long process of differentiation, imply the existence of ancient contacts which must have been more extensive than mere occasional exchanges of material goods.

To understand settlement and the evolution of Aka-Bantu relations,



9.1 Aka settlements in the Lobaye River area and the locations of their Black neighbours

the identity attributed to each party in the consciousness of the other must be taken into account, for these contribute to the constitution of relations and the definition of their form.

Conceived of by their neighbours as a separate entity, or one that is linked to chimpanzees as related in folk-tales, the Aka (*yandenga* in Monzombo, *bambenga* in Ngbaka and in Ngando, *bakola* in Isongo) are always semantically opposed to men (*mose* in Monzombo, *yo* in Ngbaka, *moto* in Ngando, *mondo* in Isongo) or to villagers (*bose* in Monzombo, *wagba* in Ngbaka, *moto a mboka* in Ngando, *mondobo* in Isongo). The village is conceived of as a human and cultural space, as opposed to the Aka camps in the forest. They are also differentiated from animals, their links with chimpanzees perceived as having been ruptured at some point in the past when the latter were relegated to the animal world (Delo-beau 1977). The Aka, then, occupy an intermediate state between the human world and the animal world, and are conceived of with considerable ambivalence by their 'Tall Black' neighbours. (The Aka call the neighbouring peoples *milo/bilo*, which is best translated as 'Tall Blacks'. The term has several connotations: racial, i.e. stranger or non-pygmy; cultural, i.e. villager, sedentary; social, i.e. master or boss.)

For the Tall Blacks, the Aka represent the Civilizing Being (*Etre Civilisateur*), who enabled men to make the passage from nature to culture through the introduction of fire, blacksmithing, cooking of food, and plant domestication. Even though this notion of civilizing capacity does grant the Aka with more than they actually introduced themselves, it does confirm their role as the first inhabitants of the country. In fact, the Tall Blacks made numerous moves in the Congolese Basin, and forged successive links with various Aka bands and other Pygmy groups (as the Baka of Cameroon). Occasionally, such links took the form of joint migrations. The Pygmy identity as Saviours, which is inherent in their function as Civilizing Beings, is thus reinforced in so far as it was the Pygmies who guided the Savannah peoples through the forest. The Pygmies initiated the Savannah peoples to a world which was previously alien and hostile to them, and provided them with necessary forest products (i.e. meat, gathered food, medicinal plants, etc.). In consequence, the Savannah peoples learned to exercise a degree of direct, if limited, control over the natural world of the forest. It should not be forgotten that some groups, such as the Kaka and the Ngando, have a long tradition of forest activity, a fact which has been obscured by the effects of French colonization, agricultural development, and recent commercialization. But it is evident among peoples such as the Ngaka,

who previously led a semi-nomadic life based partially on hunting, gathering and fishing in the forest. Their agricultural activities at that time were limited to the relatively undemanding cultivation of bananas (Thomas 1963).

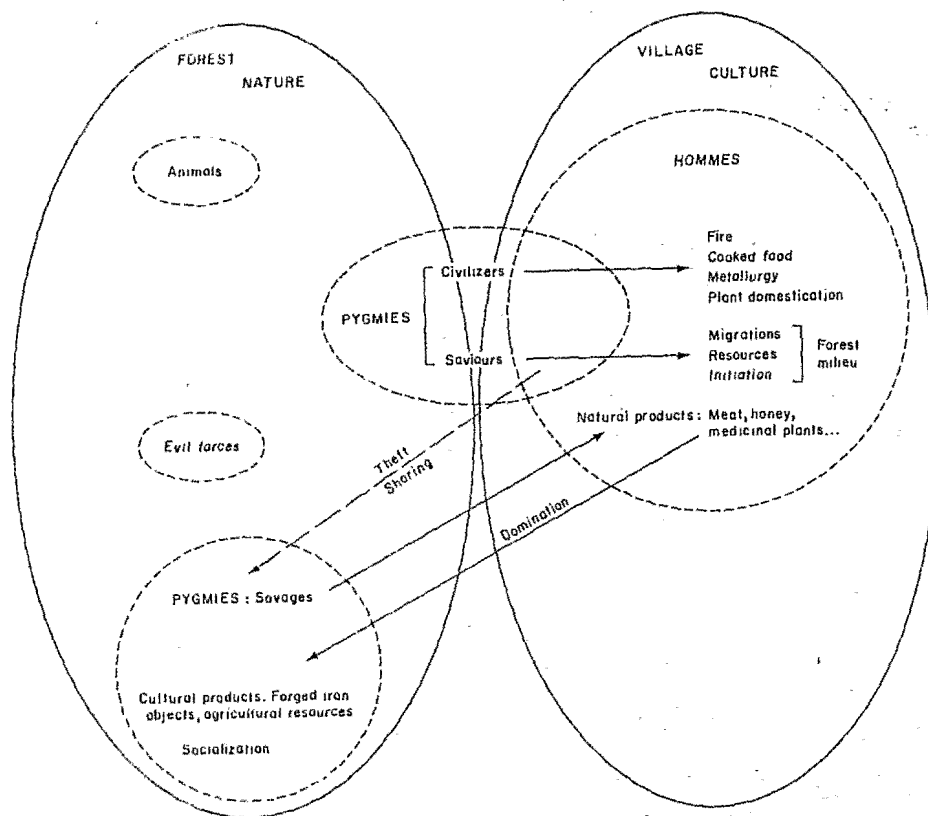
Settled on the forest edge, and along the waterways, the Tall Blacks occupy *cultural* space, whereas the Aka are confined to *natural* space within the forest. The separation in geographical area is considered as a reflection of a natural division of labour by the Tall Blacks; to the Aka it is a result of theft. They relate the tale that, upon returning from the forest, they were surprised to find that their villages (i.e. sedentary camps) had been taken over by the Tall Blacks, who in turn drove the Aka back into the forest. This interpretation is reiterated in a number of other legends. One is a Mbuti story, in which the Pygmies are robbed of their ability to propagate bananas; their neighbours fooled them and took the banana roots, leaving only the leaves to the Pygmies (Turnbull 1966). In another story, contained in a Ngbaka song, the 'gift' of Pygmy trapping techniques and rituals is revealed to have been forced (Arom 1970). Thus, the situation is inverted: Men who were nothing now find themselves in possession of all culture; whereas, the Pygmies who had everything are now totally deprived. This is the other side of the ambivalence.

Relegated to the forest, the land of savagery in the eyes of the Tall Blacks, the Aka (Civilizing Beings and Saviours) are equally Savages. This ambiguity underlies the Tall Blacks' view of the Aka, who are objects of scorn but also of fear. That the Aka cohabit the same territory with dreaded spirits, share in common their faculties of strength, skill and mobility, and possess the ability to contact those spirits, impresses and even frightens the Tall Blacks. They resort to the magical and therapeutic knowledge of the Aka, and their own pantheon shows the influence of their natural and supernatural world.

Deprived of culture (Savages), the Aka are bound to be dominated. The counterpart to this view, which at the same time justifies their domination, is the socialization of the Aka. In return for their services, the colonizers provide goods to the dominated people, goods which they can no longer produce themselves (forged-iron objects, cultivated plants, etc.). The supply of such items is merely the material element of a much wider socialization policy, one that implies a whole conception of the relations between man and nature. To the colonizers, the Aka are asocial beings, with a life-style characterized by laxity and absence of rules: lack of constraint in sexual relations and marriage practices, wasted

natural resources, institutionalized theft, etc. Moral action favours the organization of marriages and the institution of the dowry, the construction of food storehouses, etc. Such practices assure the proper reproduction of life: of men, of animals and of plants. This point of view is inherent in the confrontation between two antithetical socio-economic systems (hierarchical organization and centralization of authority versus egalitarian organization and diffusion of power; lineal organization versus groupings of shallow genealogical distance; predatory action versus limited transformation of a forest environment). The combination 'man-villager' cannot be disassociated from the connotation 'master' (*mo* in Monzombo; *molo* in Ngbaka; *kumu* in Ngando and Isongo). Thus, 'men-villagers-masters' are opposed to 'Pygmies-foresters-dependants'. But the actual undertaking of domination, despite appearances on the part of the Aka (apparent flexibility, ease of contact, etc.), remains elusive and the justifications are still disputed.

The socio-economic relations which objectively link the two groups do not, in fact, correspond to the state of subjugation that ideological representations legitimize. For a long time, contacts have taken the form of balanced reciprocity of services, based upon complementary opposition of technologies and modes of adaptation to the natural environment. These relations do not constitute an articulation, conditioning the reproduction of either or both groups. Nevertheless, it is the beginning of a determined mutual dependence for the Aka. Constraints such as withdrawing the products of work, restricting freedom of movement, institutionalizing physical punishment (including military skirmishes), etc., are enforced upon them by their very economic need for iron, which is used in tool manufacture. More important than the supply of agricultural produce, this need for iron (which they obviously did not have previously) lends an imperative character to relations between Aka and Tall Blacks. The gap between the actual content of relations, and the representation of it in Tall Black ideology is projected into their supernatural world. By way of example, the Ngbaka represent the relations through the behaviour they attribute to the *mimbo* or trapping spirits. In fact the *mimbo* (originally given to the Ngbaka by the Aka), do not hunt for their own benefit but are content with a limited portion of game. It is this attitude which the colonizers really desire in their relations with the natives. Morphologically, physiologically, and culturally comparable to forest people, the *mimbo* appear 'not only as "the spirits of hunting and trapping" but also as a projection of "the Aka-client" in a magical appropriation process' (Arom and Thomas 1974). Thus, the



9.2 Pygmy-Farmer relations symbolically represented

ideological representation legitimizes not only existing relations – enabling the Tall Blacks to devote themselves to their essentially cultural activities (metallurgy, agriculture) by a division of labour – but also more institutionalized relations of dependence which may emerge in the future. Figure 9.2 is an attempt to simplify the status and functions of each group.

Ecology and forest exploitation

Of all the variable features of the natural environment which act as *ecological* constraints on the Aka hunter-gatherers (Bahuchet 1978a), two are primary and may account for differences in subsistence activities in various areas of the forest. On the one hand, the forest cover in the Aka area is heterogeneous in character; on the other, there are modalities in

relations with agricultural groups, which are themselves influenced by the nature of the forest. We will examine both these factors from a historical perspective.

Heterogeneity in the forest milieu

Over and above the fact that the forest consists of a mosaic, a juxtaposition of micro-environments brought about by the varying life-cycles of trees (the fall of which provokes the growth of different species in the undergrowth), the nature of the soil is the determining factor in several types of plant formation. Humid soils are characterized by particular species of vegetation. In the flat areas of the Congo Basin, waterways have very wide beds which are regularly or permanently flooded, forming marsh zones. Vegetation varies according to the wetness of the soil, which is in turn a function of the rhythm of flooding: a dense, marshy forest with low shelter grows on flooded soil without drainage; a flood-plain forest with a high canopy grows on soil which is permanently wet, but also occasionally flooded with one to two metres of water; a mixed forest grows on wet slopes that are only flooded for short periods and eventually dry out. Besides the flower composition, which is different from that of solid-ground forests, wet-zone wildlife is very different: the biggest mammals (which are the most valuable to the Aka) such as the elephant and the *situtunga* antelope (*Tragelaphus spekei*) are found in marshy forest; the *bongo* antelope (*Boocercus euryceros*) inhabits the mixed forests of the wet slopes.

Solid-ground forest itself consists of several types: semi-deciduous forest, in which flower composition varies according to sub-soil type (secondary sandstone, tertiary sandstone or alluvia, quartzite sandstone, etc.); or evergreen forest of a widely dominant species (*Gilbertiodendron deweyi*, *Cesalpiniaceae*). Large wildlife in the semi-deciduous forest consists of several species of duikers (*Apholophus*), red hogs (*Potamochoerus porcus*) and apes (gorilla and chimpanzee); in evergreen forests, a species of duiker (*Cephalophus leucogaster*) and the bongo are common.

Thus, the primary model of the humid tropical forest is not homogeneous as is sometimes supposed, but *heterogeneous*, at both the local and regional levels.

Before European colonization, this heterogeneity appeared as a difference in varying frequency of hunting techniques and 'usual' game. Pygmies in the Lobaye region, where semi-deciduous forest is predom-

inant, hunt anthropoids, red hogs and duikers with spear-tracking techniques in the rainy season. Motaba Pygmies, on the other hand, living in a flooded forest zone, hunt elephants and situtungas with the same techniques, but in any season. Groups living near the Motaba springs, or near the Sangha, where evergreen and semi-deciduous forests are mingled, hunt bongos. Diversity is also found in the exploitation of caterpillars for food. The northern part of the Aka territory, which has a tropical climate during the rainy season, is well provided with caterpillar trees (solid-ground forest including Meliaceae). At the south of the same zone, the flooded forest has fewer species of trees that support edible caterpillars, and the climate is of equatorial type; hence, caterpillars are relatively scarce.

It is important to acknowledge these characteristics of the natural environment and take them into account when comparing the modes of subsistence of various African Pygmy groups.

Exchange with the Tall Blacks

Today, the Aka maintain a complex system of exchange with the sedentary Tall Black farmers. In addition to working in the fields for several weeks each year, products of the hunt are the basis of reciprocal exchange (i.e. meat for metal tools, salt, and starchy foods). The use of Aka Pygmy labour on a periodic basis on the plantations is quite recent (within the last twenty years). By contrast, the exchange of meat for metal tools is very old.

In the pre-colonial situation, the exchange pattern seems to have been more-or-less identical for most forest groups. The heterogeneity of the forest environment did not influence the character of these exchanges; what varied was the animal species from which meat was produced. Neither was there any noteworthy influence from the villagers on the types of hunting practised. It was more a question of Aka exchanging surplus food products after their own consumption needs had been met.

Conditions changed with the creation of a commercial market and an external demand for products which were not traditionally used, either by the Aka or the villagers. This occurred when the Portuguese, with the help of intermediary marketing groups, undertook trade on the coasts of the Congo in the sixteenth century, i.e. long before the Europeans actually entered the Aka forest area. The first mention of this commerce is found in the 'Description de l'Afrique' by O. Dapper in 1686. He recounts that 'dwarves' living outside the forest brought 'elephant teeth'

to the townspeople of the Lovango Kingdom; these ivory tusks were then sold to the Portuguese.

We lack adequate documents to analyse the importance of this trade economy in the northwest Congo Basin before twentieth-century white penetration. Some clues lead us to believe that inhabitants of this area took active part in the ivory trade (Sautter 1966), sending ivory to Stanley Pool in the south via the Sangha and Oubangi waterways, and to the northwest (Cameroon, Adamawa) with the help of Hausa traders (Bruehl 1918).

At the time of colonization, the trade was imposed on the villagers, who in turn compelled the Aka to take part via their exchange relations with them. From then on, exchange acted as a constraint, modifying relations between the Aka and the forest (i.e. emphasis on hunting efforts, privileged use of certain hunting techniques, and therefore changes in group structure, etc.). However, in spite of domination, the status of the Tall Blacks as 'masters' (*konza*) would be better likened to tutors or protectors than owners. They are, in fact, 'masters' who do not own the Aka, but who make them dependent by monopolizing metallurgy, agriculture and, most importantly, the access to new economic networks. The dependence of the Aka is in no way a form of slavery, a parallel sometimes drawn by European colonizers on the basis of Tall Black interpretations of their relation to the Aka. The Aka are not 'desocialized', neither are their demographic and economic reproduction controlled by their 'masters'. The reproduction of Aka camps is achieved on the basis of the kinship system (Guillaume forthcoming).

The Colonial trade

The heterogeneity of the forest, discussed above, becomes a striking factor once the whites enter the area (1890) and divide it into concessionary companies after an 1899 decree. These companies were privileged to exploit natural products (i.e. rubber, resin, oleaginous plants, ivory and pelts) and were granted commercial monopoly (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1972).

Natural products with commercial potential were few and of variable importance. Rubber, ivory, pelts and palm nuts were products with an important and permanent market; by contrast, other minor products were only occasionally commercialized, on a small scale (i.e. copal resin, raffia, rattan and kola nuts). Some of these resources are located in marshy forest zones (copal, a resin used in the varnish industry; ivory;

raffia); others, like palm nuts, are found on the edge of the forest (particularly Lobaye). For this reason, the villagers in various regions had production activities which differed according to resource exploitation. The shifting interests of the concessionary companies, in combination with natural diversity, account for the differences.

From 1899 to 1910: ivory Right from the beginning, several foreign depots were created within each concession. Their exclusive aim was trading, especially of ivory. The whole of French Equatorial Africa exported more than 100 tons of ivory per year during this period (Bruehl 1918). The villagers were responsible for the ivory market, but it is obvious that the Aka were the principal producers, as several texts maintain. As the only people with hunting skills, they were eventually provided with guns by company agents in order to improve hunting of elephants. Other groups were content to set large traps. From then on, the Tall Blacks added the intermediary role to their technological superiority; a role which has increased to the present day at the expense of the Aka.

Ivory exploitation had several consequences:

1. The development of a type of hunting which provided large quantities of meat that was not traditionally used.
2. The intensification of contacts, diversification, and an increase in volume of exchanged goods. For the Pygmies, the counterparts of ivory were iron and salt.
3. The depletion of elephant populations.
4. The reinforcement of the bases of power of the *Tuma*, the 'master of the great hunt'.

By virtue of personal qualities of strength and courage, of extensive knowledge of nature and magico-religious arts, the *Tuma's* intervention is indispensable for the organization of a successful hunt. Therefore, his role is primary in the acquisition of iron. But even if his participation is critical in the hunt, and he controls the exchange of ivory, he does not, for all that, widen his field of authority. Neither he nor the *Mbai-moto* (the elder of the agnatic kinship group), who centralizes the iron collected after a great hunt, attain generalized power thereby; neither do they accumulate material wealth, for goods remain the property of the whole group. Despite the increasing introduction of iron, the use of material goods remains egalitarian.

From 1908 on, due to the spread of firearms, the ivory trade dwindled

in importance as the elephants dramatically diminished in number. At this point, the companies began to get interested in rubber.

From 1910 to 1940: wild rubber In 1910, the eleven concessionary companies which shared the northern Congo forest merged to create the 'Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui' (CFSO), on a 17-million-hectare concession which entirely encompassed the Aka territory. From that point on, this company was entitled to the leasing of rubber. Trading was no longer a monopoly, but nevertheless the CFSO remained the only trading company.

The company employed manpower from the villages in order to collect rubber by 'bleeding' the trees in the forest. Company agents, alone in foreign depots, forced men into the forest to collect rubber. This compulsory aspect was further reinforced by the imposition of government taxes, payable only in rubber. This was to be the gruesome epoch of forced labour denounced by André Gide in his *Travels in the Congo* (1962).

Thus were men compelled to live in the forest and work without rest; women were forced to tend manioc plantations in the villages in order to feed the porters, the armies, and the road workers. In such a situation, the exhausted villagers were unable to meet subsistence requirements and relied upon their Aka 'allies' to produce meat. (In fact, the Aka were never involved in the harvesting of rubber.) The Aka, relying upon familiar spear-hunting techniques, hunted animals less dangerous and more easily caught than the elephants (particularly red hogs).

However, from 1925 on, a market for duiker skins developed in France; the skins were tanned on the spot and sent out to make coats and 'chamois leather' (*sic*). Commercialization of the skins, together with the fact that the Aka were often settled in the forests near the work camps (to provide meat and help with net hunting), resulted in a period of acquisition by the Aka of the techniques of hunting with nets, which may be traced out. That this in fact occurred is confirmed in stories and traditions of the Aka and other groups, which related that hunting with nets was a village practice unlike 'real' Aka spear-hunting techniques. Several clues confirm it, in particular the custom of sharing meat, which is not at all egalitarian compared to that of meat acquired in collective spear-hunting. (See Bahuchet 1978b for the details of sharing.)

Although rubber was by far the most important product from the company's point of view, it also organized the gathering of copal and palm nuts (*Elaeis guineensis*, the almond, or palm nut, provides an oil

used in food industries – i.e. margarine – and chemical industries – i.e. soap). If the Aka did not take part in rubber collection, it has been proven that they did contribute their labour to the copal and palm nut industries in the Ibenga and Motaba areas. In the Lobaye region they only did so on an occasional basis; they were mainly suppliers of meat.

From 1940 on: *duiker hunters* More and more, the Aka utilized collective net hunting. To be efficient, it required the participation of numerous adults, men and women, to do the beating. The camps were then on a much larger scale than ever before (40 to 60 adults instead of 15 to 25), and became more permanent.

The slaughter of *duikers* increased from 1937 on, after the *CRSO* disappeared and the 'Sociétés Indigènes de Prévoyance' (*SIP*) were created. The development of saw-mills, diamond mines, rubber and coffee plantations resulted in employees being brought in from other areas. In 1949, such employees formed 22 per cent of the total population of the Boda and Mbaiki districts (Bouscayrol 1950).

The *SIP* aimed at developing agriculture, herding, hunting, fishing, gathering, and organizing the preparation and marketing of products (Suret-Canale 1977). After World War II there was a growing demand for raw skins. Following the decrease in European herds, the *SIP* got the monopoly for buying skins (by decree in 1945). In some forest zones, the market in the fifties was averaging around 27,000 skins of *Cephalophus* per year (Dongier 1953).

The decline of the great spear-hunting expeditions, linked with new motivations and a decrease in 'big game', provoked a decline in the position of *Tuma* (outlined above); whereas the *nganga* diviner-healer intervened more and more to ensure the success of rituals associated with net hunting.

Thus, the Aka devoted themselves to the search for export goods, or contributed indirectly to it by feeding the workers. In either case, their intervention implies that production activities turned outwards. This tendency responds precisely to the colonial administrative design.

The 'Taming' policy

Enigmatic figures, long classed in European thought with spirits, monsters, 'pre-men' or 'ape-men', the Pygmies only achieved the status of men shortly before the establishment of colonial structures. They were perceived as 'back-ward', 'uncultivated' beings by the administrators; they led a 'wandering' or 'roving' life in search of subsistence. None-

theless, their primitiveness was seen as an insurmountable hindrance to the 'civilizing mission' of the colonizers. 'Naive', naturally 'quiet' and 'peaceful', the Pygmies were not elements of disorder; for the missionaries, their belief in one God simplified matters and justified their Christianization. They were seen as living testimony to the universality of monotheism, even among the most primitive populations.

The colonial enterprise itself responded to a highly humanitarian motive: to free the Pygmies from subjection by their neighbours. In the 1930s, it took the form of the so-called 'Taming Policy', which was marked with sentiments of 'softness', 'care', and 'kindness', and stressed the need for 'tact', 'caution', and 'patience'. Its purpose was to win the Pygmies' trust, to attract them and familiarize them with administrative contact, and to show them the advantages of medical care. This was accomplished with the help of gifts of iron, salt, and tobacco. The idea was that the Pygmies would thereby see the benefits of dealing directly with the Whites, and rid themselves of their traditional intermediaries.

This 'prudent' policy was explained by the 'timid', 'fearful' temperament of the Pygmies (who were always ready to flee into the forest, or cross the Oubangui River). They were not yet accustomed to the idea of 'emancipation', or resisting their 'masters', for fear of losing their privileges. This type of rationalization and behaviour is a constant feature of the colonial experience in contexts of dependency or slavery, especially in Sahelian and Saharan Africa (Guillaume 1975). Rushing the evolutionary process could lead to a chaotic, uncontrollable situation, for here too it was a matter of adjustment in the relations between traditional forces. Written works mention, for instance, how the Pygmies helped to single out and denounce Tall Blacks who were resisting the work imposed by the colonial administration. The colonial aim was to emancipate the Pygmies from their 'masters', only to make them dependent upon the administration. In so doing, their participation in 'productive work' was ensured, as was the 'development' of the colony. Pygmy collaboration led to further weakening and more effective control of their neighbours.

In fact, the Pygmies' contribution was indispensable to the exploitation of the sparsely populated areas (exploitation which, for a long time, consisted mainly of 'looting'). The labour shortage was made worse by the colonial administration itself: the result of excesses by the concessionary regime and the administrative work projects (i.e. out-migration, malnutrition, high mortality rates, etc.). Added to this was the spread of sleeping sickness; the confluence of the Ibenga and the Motaba

Rivers with the Oubangui was an important centre in this regard. The value of demographic data, based on very approximate estimates for the early period of colonization, sets a limit on extrapolation. But, 'we must note', as Coquery-Vidrovitch (1972) has put it, 'the sharp decline [in population] affecting the lower part of the Oubangui (Ibenga, Motaba, Likouala), which undoubtedly corresponded to real phenomena: that of the semi-desertion of the land which was the result of the Forest Company regime and the effects of sleeping sickness'.

As the 'taming' of the Pygmies progressed and they made repeated contacts with the administrators, a policy of 'stabilization' was undertaken. Established among other populations since 1915, it consisted of regrouping settlements along communication axes for the purpose of facilitating control (i.e. census, tax collection, marketing, labour recruitment, etc.). The Pygmies were encouraged to settle along such routes, to undertake cultivation and sell their products either at the markets or at foreign depots. In accordance with the policy of 'prudence', they were not immediately burdened with the same obligations that had been imposed on their neighbours. But the final result of the policy was to integrate the Pygmies fully into the colonial system. This objective was clearly stated in the recommendations to district officers made by the Governor-General for French Equatorial Africa in 1934, 'In the future, when they [Pygmies] are used to us and our institutions, which they will have profited from and will still want to enjoy, we may initiate the weight of taxes and other obligations. Therefore, you must not enter those you have registered on your tax lists for at least five years' (Governor-General 1934).

The commencement of this programme varied according to the level of regional administrative control. In 1933, Pygmies from the Epena area to the south of Aka country were already settled, included in the census, and were paying taxes. They served as an example for the administration to hold up to the Aka Pygmies. The Aka in the Ibenga-Motaba area were included in a fragmentary census in 1936. They took part in the exploitation of copal and palm nuts, and had begun to sell their products without recourse to their 'masters'. Some settled close to communication routes, maintained plantations, and grew manioc, corn and bananas. Their Tall Black neighbours discouraged their enterprise, and willingly furnished bad advice as to cultivating techniques.

The Aka were undoubtedly affected by the colonial economy, but the 'stabilization' policy only affected a minority of them, primarily in the riverside areas of the Oubangui. In the Lobaye district, its effects were

limited. This may have resulted from later control by the administration, successive additions of territory to the region, and numerous changes in internal organization. There were camps settled along the communication axes, but it was not until 1949 that the M'Baiki- and Boda-district Aka were included in a partial census. The Mongoumba groups were not covered in this first investigation. These Pygmies supplied meat, and sometimes sold it directly to the markets, a valuable consideration in view of the difficulty of feeding the labour-force.

It appears that, on the whole, the 'taming' policy proved to be ephemeral, with results that were contrary to desired aims. If profound acculturation took place among several groups in the Beton and Dongou regions, and a certain amount of economic independence was achieved, elsewhere 'emancipation' led to an aggravation of the dependence of the Aka on the Tall Blacks. By encouraging an increase in production for the external market, stimulating exchange and creating new needs, the colonial administration did not assist the Pygmies in controlling their position in a new world; rather, they reinforced the privileged position of the Tall Black intermediaries.

Aka integration into Tall Black production activities

Following the 'taming' policy, the process of dependency developed without direct outside intervention. It was not until 1974 that public interest was renewed in the Central African part of Aka territory.

In the preceding 25-year period, one determining factor emerged in the evolution of relations between the Aka and Tall Blacks. This was the increase and expansion of agriculture, the decisive threshold of which was reached in the 1960s with the commercial production of coffee among most of the Lobaye farmers. From then on, the services which the Aka were expected to provide had less and less to do with their forest skills and knowledge. Their position as suppliers of forest products (ivory, meat, pelts, copal, palm nuts) was based upon traditional collecting technology; in the new state, they were integrated into a technological milieu and introduced to production activities that were foreign to them.

The Aka became a work force primarily to be used in agriculture, a tendency which developed at the expense of their forest existence. From the initial exchange system of game and gathered products for iron and agricultural products, there developed a new basis of exchange: labour for food, manufactured goods and money. The exact nature of the

exchange depended upon the type of service provided. Money, which had been introduced several years before (to some extent during the 'taming' policy), was exchanged primarily in the form of wages for agricultural workers.

Today the production activities of the Aka take various forms in accordance with the situations of neighbouring groups and villages to which they are tied. In the Kenga area where coffee production is unimportant, the Ngando hunt during several months of the year. In addition, they claim meat products from the Aka which they then sell to urban centres and large forest and coffee enterprises. It is important to note that this trade is rarely, if ever, carried out directly by the Aka; it is usually done through the villagers to whom they are linked. This contrasts to the situation of the Mbuti from Ituri, where outside traders carry on the exchange of meat (Hart 1978). Thus, the Aka maintain forest activities which are nonetheless conditioned by their neighbours. Much hunting time is devoted to producing game for the 'masters'. Furthermore, net hunting is on the increase, and the use of snares (which they recently learned from the villagers) is replacing track hunting. Such snares are made during the rainy season out of bicycle brake cables. The use of snares, and the tending of those that belong to the 'master', has provoked a notable reduction in camp mobility. The products of hunting have a comparable importance in the Ndele region which is still rich in game. There, the Aka hunt with nets for the greater part of the year in order to sell meat to the villagers (the Banda-Yangere agriculturalists). For the remaining part they work for wages on the coffee plantations.

Elsewhere (Mongoumba, Loko, Bagandou, Ngoto, Bambia), the Tall Blacks rely on Aka labour for their plantations. The development of agriculture and coffee production outstripped the labour supplies of the villages, and Aka labour is now used to reinforce the productive capacity of the Tall Blacks. In addition to supplying much-needed labour, it allows the Tall Blacks to avoid the hardest chores and attend to other matters.

Alongside their integration into agricultural production, the Aka carry on their forest exploitation, for themselves and for their 'masters'. Participation in agricultural work usually occurs at the beginning of the dry season (December-January), during the land-clearing and coffee-cropping phases. Activities are more generalized in the major part of the season (cutting of trees, burning-off, etc.). The annual cycle is thus divided into two periods: one which is increasingly determined by the

economic life of the villagers; the other resting on more traditional bases. The latter period is characterized by the collection of caterpillars in the rainy season, an activity in which numerous villagers take part. Between the two extremes – forest life interrupted by several weeks' stay near the villages at the beginning of the dry season, and settlement on the edge of agricultural areas with forest camps in the rainy season (August-September) – there are a number of intermediate arrangements. The Pygmies may return to the forest for the duration of the rainy season, or in the middle of the dry season, to hunt with nets, collect honey, or fish. But the general tendency is increasing polarization around village centres.

The process of Aka integration into the Tall Blacks' economy is similar to the pattern of evolution described for the southern part of Aka territory (Demesse 1978):

1. Nomadism decreases and the time spent in settled camps on the edge of the forest, close to villages, increases. Hunting and gathering are increasingly carried on from these bases, and no longer from temporary forest camps.
2. The territory of exploitation is more and more restricted. Great hunting expeditions are slowly replaced by shorter trips of limited distance.
3. There is a decrease in natural resources and lowered hunting efficiency occurs because of over-hunting in the most frequented areas. Big game, such as elephants, bongo, and red hog are becoming scarce, and only survive deep in the forest. The most common game are duikers and other small animals: forest porcupine, mongoose, genet, rats, and squirrels. Duikers are the net game par excellence (in beats which are increasingly executed in shorter trips), but they are also trapped with snares. Snares are used for other animals in addition, small hunts are sometimes carried out by a family, or by two or three men, sometimes with the help of dogs. Snaring and small hunting parties are popular because they are so appropriate to changes in animal resources and hunting activities in general.

During this phase of disintegration of the traditional economy, the decrease in subsistence collected from the forest (due to the decline in the productivity of hunting) results in increased consumption of agricultural products (manioc, corn, bananas). Agricultural foods are no longer a welcome contribution to the diet, but form the major part of

Aka food intake. In consequence, their diet is increasingly imbalanced, and malnutrition results. Thus their former dependence is significantly increased.

Unlike the Baka Pygmies of the Konabembe (southeast Cameroon), who started their own household plantations in the 1950s (Althabe 1965), the Aka switched to farming without achieving independent production. Time spent working village fields and in forest activities, and cultural norms, constituted barriers to the development of autonomous agricultural production. These limiting factors are further reinforced by the pre-existing situation of dependency. The fields of most benefit to the Aka are the plantations (manioc, bananas, oil palm trees) abandoned, sometimes momentarily, by their 'masters'. In cases of marked sedentarization (except for groups of M'baiki that have cultivated for about ten years), they nonetheless begin by clearing small parcels of land.

Widening dependency leads to the incorporation of the Aka into other sectors of the Tall Blacks' economy: fishing for the Monzombo, crafts, portage, construction, domestic labour, well-drilling, maintenance works, etc.

The position of the 'masters' is strengthened by the development of a credit system which ties the Aka, through indebtedness, to their creditors. The weakly developed market network exacerbates this problem, as the Aka are unable to supply themselves directly. Therefore, the money from cash wages immediately returns to its original source. The decrease in mobility, and increase in settlement near agricultural areas, places the Aka within easy reach of their neighbours; as a result they are susceptible to forced labour. During periods of settlement near to the villages, the 'masters' disrupt the camps on a daily basis. Conflict ensues, and the mood is in sharp contrast to the peace and quiet of forest camp life. The consumption of manioc and corn alcohol increases, and ragged clothing, inappropriate to the climate, is common.

The socio-economic dynamics of the Aka's situation may also be observed in neighbouring societies. The phenomena affect the internal organization of the camps, as well as relations within the bands. The acquisition of material goods is increasingly the result of individual effort, and no longer based upon group cooperation. This is obviously related to agricultural production, but also to hunting techniques which are highly individualistic, or at least require fewer and fewer participants. The process of individualization results in the disintegration of

former associations between camps and lineages, or segments of lineages in the villages. Contacts are thus diversified, and even if the traditional 'master' remains a privileged spokesman, any villager is a potential employer. The development of polygamy, previously non-existent, is undoubtedly linked to the possibility of acquiring and using bride-wealth. At a band level, the decline in cooperative activity is evident in the diminishing number of great hunts, which, in any case, take place at the beginning of the dry season when demands for agricultural labour are at their height.

The disintegration of the hunting and gathering economy of the Aka and their incorporation into the economic system of the Tall Blacks, has increased in pace since 1974. At the moment, it is occurring rapidly in the Mongoumba area, where the Aka are linked to a people with little traditional orientation to the forest, the Monaombo. The decision of the authorities to develop this area is accompanied by aims to integrate the Aka. Confined, until recently, to simple invitations to settlement and agriculturalism, this project received planning impetus with the opening of the first 'school of integration'. The implementation of the integration policy is reinforced by the presence of Catholic missionaries, whose aims and objectives are more-or-less similar. The acculturation process is strikingly rapid, and is symbolized by the appearance of mud huts, based on the village model but smaller in size. It is certainly linked to the desire of the Aka to acquire material goods, and to enter fully a world which previously had been marginal to them; their entry being symbolic of the end of their inferiority. Access to it is made easier through knowledge of the national tongue: Sango. Their present evolution is conditioned by their existing relations with the Tall Blacks. To them, the Aka are folk objects to be displayed for visitors; yet, the Aka regularly hire out as farm labourers to their 'masters' and 'bosses' (words which were themselves drawn from the colonial vocabulary). The two societies have become closely interdependent; social reproduction of the Aka no longer occurs without the aid of their neighbours.

One recent phenomenon may provide us with a clue to the future: during the dry season of 1979, Aka camps moved away from village settlements and started their own plantations at the edge of the forest.

New needs are born of new values. The definition of policy with regard to the Aka, which cannot be dissociated from the policy towards the forest itself, must take into account and be based upon the combination of agricultural and forest activities.

Note

- 1 This article emerges from two communications to the Paris Symposium on Hunting and Gathering Societies. S. Bahuchet originally dealt with the ecological constraints of the forest environment and the social and technological influences of the peoples with whom the Pygmies are in touch. H. Guillaume dealt with the nature, form, and evolution of the relations between the Pygmies and the successive colonizers of the forest. The whole text was extensively reviewed and discussed by its two authors, and reflects common ideas. The data presented here were recorded in the northern part of the Aka foraging area (Lobaye region); some information is still available for the southern part (Ibenga-Motaba region).

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